

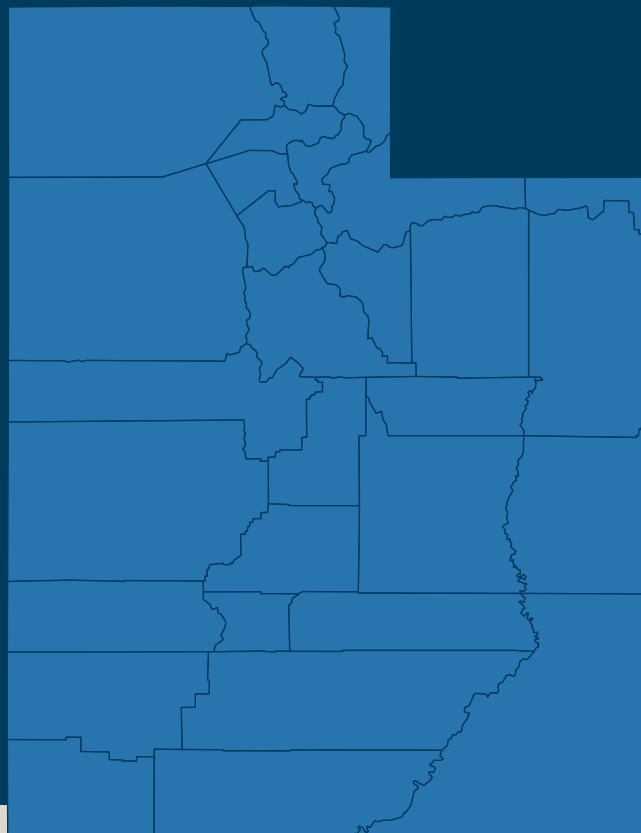
Student Homelessness in Utah:

Trends, Disparities, and Opportunities for Action

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Executive Summary



Utah’s rising housing costs and limited supply of affordable housing continue to shape student homelessness across the state, even as annual counts

fluctuate. We analyzed data from the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) and Ed Data Express from school year (SY) 2017–18 to SY 2025–26 to understand the prevalence, characteristics, and educational experiences of students experiencing homelessness (under the McKinney-Vento definition), along with

policy considerations. Our findings underscore that mitigating student homelessness requires sustained investment and coordinated action across education, housing, health, and community systems. See the full report for a more comprehensive analysis.



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Key Study Findings

Student homelessness declined in SY 2025–26, although counts have fluctuated over the past decade.

After rebounding to 10,804 students (1.62%) in SY 2024–25, near Utah’s prepandemic peak, the number of students experiencing homelessness fell by nearly 12% to 9,622 students (1.47%) in SY 2025–26. Although Utah’s identified rate remains below the national rate of 3.0%, inconsistent district identification practices and reliance on enrollment-based snapshots may leave many students unidentified, particularly those living temporarily with other families.

Native American/Alaska Native students experience the highest rates of homelessness in Utah.

Native American/Alaska Native students experienced the highest rates of homelessness of any racial or ethnic group, increasing from 9.7% in SY 2019–20 to 14.0% in SY 2023–24, nearly nine times the state rate of 1.6%. Hispanic/Latine students represented the largest number of students experiencing homelessness, increasing from 4,678 (4.2%) in SY 2019–20 to 8,106 (6.4%) in SY 2023–24.

Nearly half of Utah students experiencing homelessness are in elementary school.

Students in Grades PK–5 consistently represent the largest share of students experiencing homelessness, accounting for between 44.0% and 49.0% of all students experiencing homelessness across the period examined. In SY 2023–24, 28.8% of students experiencing homelessness were in high school (Grades 9–12) and 22.5% were in middle school (Grades 6–8).

Students experiencing homelessness face substantial achievement gaps in meeting English language arts (ELA) or mathematics standards.

In SY 2022–23, only 12.8% of students experiencing homelessness were proficient in mathematics compared with 40.2% of all students statewide. Similarly, 15.6% were proficient in ELA compared with 44.4% statewide.

Graduation rates show steady improvement, but a 16 percentage-point gap persists.

Graduation rates for high school students experiencing homelessness improved steadily from 69.0% in SY 2021–22 to 72.8% in SY 2024–25. Despite this progress, their graduation rate remained 16.1 percentage points below the 88.9% statewide rate.

Students experiencing homelessness are nearly twice as likely to be chronically absent.

In SY 2022–23, nearly half (48.1%) of students experiencing homelessness were chronically absent compared with 26.5% of all students statewide. Chronic absenteeism peaked in SY 2021–22 at 50.7% for students experiencing homelessness and remains a persistent obstacle to learning engagement and stability.

Students experiencing homelessness have suspension and expulsion rates more than twice those of all students statewide.

In SY 2024–25, 6.1% of students experiencing homelessness received a suspension or expulsion compared with 2.7% of all students. Discipline rates among students experiencing homelessness increased from 4.6% in SY 2021–22 and were more than twice the statewide rate in 3 of the 4 years examined, highlighting persistent inequities in exclusionary discipline.



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Policy Considerations

Standardize statewide student housing identification practices.

Adopt a uniform statewide housing questionnaire administered to all families during annual enrollment and registration, drawing on best practices from Jordan School District and neighboring states. District-level discretion currently leads to inconsistent screening and underidentification, especially among doubled-up families.

Align homeless student counting methodologies with federal and state standards.

Transition public reporting from single-day Point-in-Time snapshot counts (e.g., October 1) to cumulative annual counts as required under McKinney-Vento. Cumulative reporting captures all students experiencing homelessness throughout the full school year, providing a clearer picture for policy planning and resource allocation.

Strengthen state data systems and public reporting.

Enhance the timeliness, accessibility, and transparency of USBE public datasets regarding student homelessness. Reducing reliance on lagging federal data tools will enable districts, policymakers, and researchers to assess emerging trends and monitor educational outcomes effectively.

Initiate statewide cross-sector coordination.

Formalize coordination across education, housing, and youth service systems by creating an integrated framework that connects USBE, the Utah Office of Homeless Services, Continuum of Care programs, and advocacy coalitions. Aligning these systems will ensure streamlined service delivery and dedicated focus on student housing insecurity.

Address disproportionate homelessness among Native American/Alaska Native students in rural Utah.

Prioritize culturally responsive, place-based investments in rural communities with severe disparities, such as San Juan County. Expand rural transportation assistance, emergency housing linkages, and direct partnerships with tribal governments and Native American– and Alaska Native–serving organizations.

Evenly adopt restorative practices across school districts.

Embed McKinney-Vento requirements and tailored supports directly into existing positive behavioral interventions and supports and multi-tiered systems of support frameworks. Expanding restorative discipline and trauma-informed practices statewide can help reduce chronic absenteeism and curb exclusionary discipline.

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